

State Agency Says 'Stop Sending Us Money'
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We're not making this up. A state agency is out with an unusual alert to Georgia consumers -- pleading with them to stop sending in money. The Public Service Commission has had to pay back tens of thousands of dollars to people who tried to pay for a service that's actually free. The money comes from all corners of the state. The people who send it in all have one thing in common - they think telemarketers are a pain. Jonathan Edwards is one of those people who doesn't want to deal with them. "It's just annoying," Edwards said. "They interrupt your whole day and they even come in the evening. I just don't want to hear it." So Edwards sent a check for \$5 to get on the Georgia Do Not Call List. "I had a little form to fill in with the state and I sent it with a \$5 check," Edwards said. His is one of hundreds of checks the Georgia Public Service Commission is taking time to send back. "We don't want their money, we'll send their money back and we're going to tell them how they can get it for free," said Bill Edge with the PSC. It's been four years since Georgia merged its Do Not Call List with the Federal Registry and eliminated the \$5 charge. But since that time, about 7,000 Georgians have sent in checks anyway. "We're sending them back and we're telling people its free and we don't need their money," said Edge. Edwards figures the state also doesn't need the hassle of mailing all those checks back, shredding it would have been okay with him. "I'm glad to get it back but it seems like a tempest in a tea pot to get the check back," he said. Since the list went free, the number of Georgia subscribers went from 400,000 to 4 million. Charities, political candidates and companies you've done business with are still allowed to call. To sign up for the list, go to www.donotcall.gov or www.ftc.gov.

Don't Overpay for a Copy of Your Homeowner's Deed

The Cobb County Tax Commissioner recently informed the Governor's Office of Consumer Affairs that certain companies are charging consumers a substantial fee, upwards of \$50, for a certified copy of their homeowner's deed. While it is not illegal to charge a fee for this service, homeowners are advised that they can easily obtain a certified copy of their deed directly from the county clerk's office or website for a minimal fee or at no charge.

Services for the Consumer

The Governor's Office of Consumer Affairs (OCA) protects Georgia consumers and the legitimate business community in a number of ways:

Investigating consumer complaints. Complaints filed with this agency alleging fraud may form the basis for an investigation into a company's business practices. A significant quantity of complaints about a business may give rise to legal action-not on behalf of the individual complainants, but to enforce state law. The decision to investigate or file a lawsuit is based on a variety of factors.

OCA also serves as an information resource in the self-help Lemon Law complaint process and provides arbitration hearings for those eligible consumers whose motor vehicles have not been repaired by the manufacturer in a satisfactory manner.

Filing civil lawsuits in the superior courts on behalf of the State of Georgia and the public good, under the Georgia Fair Business Practices Act and other consumer protection statutes. While this agency cannot represent individual consumers, some legal actions do produce restitution for individuals, as well as

serving as a deterrent to other potential violators. You can read about some of our recent successes in 2006.

The Consumers' Utility Counsel Division (CUC) also represents residential and small-business customers, as a class, in utility proceedings before the Georgia Public Service Commission and state and federal courts, particularly in rate cases. This helps to assure fairness and adequate competition. A report from the CUC lists its primary 2006 accomplishments.

OCA works to obtain reimbursement from businesses for consumer losses or obtain settlements concerning companies' future activity. We can issue hefty fines against those who violate consumer protection laws and seek greater penalties where the victims are elderly or disabled. Our office can order businesses to stop unfair or deceptive activities by issuing cease-and-desist orders. We can file legal action against companies or individuals operating in violation of Georgia law and seek injunctive relief, court-ordered civil penalties or other remedies.

Pursuing criminal charges against individuals or companies who commit fraud through identity theft, telemarketing, home repair, or a computer network such as the Internet. A few of the recent cases that resulted in criminal prosecution are spotlighted here.

Educating consumers – a vital part of our mission. We believe the best consumer protection is a widespread public awareness of consumers' rights and of the most common snares in the marketplace. This knowledge helps people deal more effectively with businesses and make better choices and decisions. On this web site we are pleased to inform the reader about many different consumer issues, including alerts to new or urgent information.